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Rhythms Of Times And Places

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Rhythms Of Times And Places

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Artist Statement

I am inspired by living in multiple environments and experiencing many regions of the United States. My imagery varies from references to landscapes to geometric abstractions of quilt patterns. My media consists of acrylics, oils, and pastels on supports including fabric, canvas, or paper. Mixed media allows me to add multiple layers in creating visual textures, depth, and energy to draw in my viewers. The media is glazed, flowed, dripped, sprayed, rolled, scraped, and scrubbed into my interpretations of natural elements and geometric patterns.

My landscape paintings are of observations of nature, and I attempt to capture the power, motion, and energy of a moment in time. I paint from memory and purposely filter the images, simplifying and strengthening the focus of the captured moment. Rhythmic patterns in nature and seasonal light on the land are sources of my visual stimulation.

My affinity for geometric shapes and patterns is sometimes expressed in abstract paintings of quilt patterns. I form rhythmic compositions and enhance the patterns with delicate brushwork and several glazed layers for added surface interest. These patterns of quilts are also reminiscent of landscapes from a bird's eye view.

Rhythms Of Times And Places

Introduction

My career track focused on retail advertising until ten years ago when I found myself caring for an elderly parent who suffered from dementia. I moved to a rural area in central Virginia to do so, and went back to school to become an accredited K-12 visual arts teacher. As a career switcher, the certification process led to my discovery of Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program. I applied and was accepted into the MIS-IAR Program. Since the beginning of my coursework, my art and aesthetic have evolved in ways that pleased and, at times, surprised me.

I majored in fashion illustration at VCU and received my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. The program emphasized figure drawing, illustration, and graphic design. As I began my career in retail advertising, the demand for illustrators shifted to photographic images. As time progressed, I focused on design and the direction of art and creative divisions of companies. Technology was a large part of our production processes as well as daily newspaper printing and high speed web printing. The retail industry is very forward thinking and enthusiastically incorporates advances and changes. This culture of quick change, creativity, and high energy taught me to be highly experimental and open to new paths. It later helped me make a career switch and absorb a new culture.

My courses in the MIS-IAR Program have encouraged me to shift from business directed art to develop broader creative skills that focus on fine art. The synthesis of new media and ideas has stimulated my creativity. Drawing is still an important part of

my art making process. I sketch from models at open drawing classes and draw preliminary compositions for my paintings. However, my efforts have broadened to embrace new media and ideas.

Aesthetics

When I started the MIS-IAR Program, I chose painting and crafts as my two focus areas. I chose to work with abstracted landscapes and geometric form, both with a focus on color. Through trial and error, I began to simplify my naturalistic landscapes and began to paint abstracts that captured the energy, power, and drama of moments in nature. I created these pieces on a large scale to express the personal impact such moments have had on me. Juxtapositions in nature fascinate me and I respect the energy and danger of a blizzard yet stand in awe of the beauty of the blowing snow and huge, bent trees. The charisma of changing moons draws me into falling light to watch its rise over the ocean. Hurricanes personify violence yet the clashing waves are stunning visual concerts. I have experienced the mirages of the desert southwest, the fog of the northwest, the clarity of New England mountain air, and the tropics of Florida. All of these places possess their unique character, light, and energy and I will never lack for subject matter.

As I built a body of work, I began to crystallize my thoughts, media, and subject matter. Painting became my preferred process as I experimented with media and approaches. I began developing a looser, more abstract treatment of landscapes in order to represent the chaos and energy of nature. I turned to acrylics combined with pastels because these media suited my approach due to the speed with which they dry

and the sense of energetic movement I could attain. I poured, splashed, sprayed, smudged, drizzled, and rolled paint onto gessoed watercolor paper. The surfaces ranged from smooth to gently rippled which incorporated the texture of the paper with the paint layers. I selected gessoed papers as my support because they allowed me to tilt and roll the paper to unify wet sections of color. This freedom of movement helped me to capture the immediacy of moments in nature.

When using oils, I employed many layers of glazes to attain the illusion of depth and color transitions, and to portray atmospheric and lighting effects. The layers of glaze provided robust variations of surface and color that shimmered and shifted as the paintings are viewed at different times of day and from different viewpoints. These works were studies of both nature and color.

I have also developed a series of paintings of quilt block patterns that focus on surface treatment and color. Simplified compositions, using geometric shapes, are a dominant characteristic of these works. As I traveled America and saw the majesty of the land, I also become acutely aware of the strength of our roots and the people who were early settlers. The quilts left by the strong women who settled America appealed to my graphic sensibilities.

The foundation for my previous career was my strength as a graphic designer, much of which was based on a grid system and swatch boards. This approach, which was a mainstay of fashion and graphic designers, always reminded me of quilts. Also, as a child, I was taught to sew on my grandmother's treadle sewing machine with a cigar box taped to the treadle. My first projects were clothes for my dolls. This led to my interest in fabrications and fashions. Now, the combination of design and the affinity

with fabrics led to my painting series of quilt block patterns. When interpreted in paintings these blocks became statements of color and surface treatments. I did not strive to mimic or reproduce quilts. Instead, I chose to develop an aesthetic interplay by using oils on canvas in variations of scale, surface treatments, and glazes. Some of these paintings were accomplished with multiple layers of oil glazes, others combine broken color and glazes. I manipulated the glazes in a way that created undulating shimmers, reminiscent of the movement of fabric. The edges of sections were often allowed to bleed into the next edge, similar to frayed edges in fabrics. When I used broken color, I combined it with glazes which resulted in additional surface interest. I also used a saturated palette and structured, repetitive grids. The use of canvas as my support enhanced these techniques and resulted in a surface texture that added to the subtle suggestion of fabric.

Influences

Chuck Close's (1940-) use of color and his large scale portraiture has been a large influence. His combinations of color seem to vibrate with life and rhythm. Although separated by years, Claude Monet's (1840-1926) three-paneled painting, *Water Lilies* (c. 1920, Museum of Modern Art), shares a kinship of color and scale with Close's work. His work is equally influential to my own.

Close's use of broken color applied on precise grids merges into continuous tones when observed from a distance. Upon near observation, the colors and marks are clearly, crisply individual and sometimes presented in surprising combinations. He uses a wide range of high and low key colors in the treatment of each of his portrait

heads. His use of large scale forced me to repeatedly move to different viewpoints when looking at his works.

Like Close, Monet used broken color but his work is organic as opposed to geometric in its substructure. His palette consisted of a broad range of blues and greens with undertones of pinks, violets, and cream for his depictions of watery reflections of sky on his lily pond. The three large panels of *Water Lilies* required close inspection of the surface features and distance viewing to experience the entire work. His works also found me moving to various viewpoints to read the entire painting.

When I approach my work, color is the most important feature to me. My subject matter varies but color explorations are a consistent theme. The wide range of Close's palette and use of unexpected color combinations inspired me to experiment with a complex palette. In addition, the shimmering, fluid colors of Monet's work inspired me to use many translucent layers of glazes which added a luminous quality to my images. Both painters have also reinforced my preference for large scale images because of the resultant interactive viewer experience. I want the viewer to inspect and observe from near and far, and to discover color transitions and passages that occur.

Finally, the work of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) has influenced the energy and subject of nature in my paintings. The strength of his large body of work leaves a compelling impression of energy and color, and the bravado of nature unleashed. His ability to present a sense of a singular moment has stayed with me. I strive to inject that immediacy into my abstractions and landscapes.

Progression

Although educated as a designer and illustrator, I have been painting my entire life. For many years, I worked in relative isolation without interaction or guidance from other painters. The MIS-IAR Program has led me to new ways of considering my subjects and the resultant paintings. Heretofore, I focused on predominantly naturalistic, figural, and landscape painting. I have now developed more abstract interpretations influenced by elements of nature and graphic design. For instance, in the quilt *Four Moons* (Appendix, 1), I depicted four moons made with machine-stitched drawing and hand-painted, appliquéd moons. The four moons are depicted within the four quilt blocks in identical positions with varying surroundings. The circular shape of the moon is the dominant design element. This use of geometric shapes permeates all of my work.

As I experimented with media, I challenged myself to become more interpretive and less literal. I began to rely on the absorption of observed nature to provide sensations that result in my paintings. I turned to landscapes and seascapes that manifested my thoughts and observations. Living on the Chesapeake Bay and in rural Virginia gave me many vistas for inspiration. For example, watching the convergence of three bodies of water at Hampton Roads inspired my painting of *Confluence: Hampton Roads* (Appendix, 2). The merging sky and waters changed in their texture, color, and light as day turned to night. I married this turbulent sky to the churning waters and they become as one. Rather than portray an absolute horizon line and distinct color, I have unified these elements to portray their constantly shifting features. I painted this with acrylics on gessoed paper. My use of acrylic paint was highly experimental and

included new kinds of iridescent, interference, and metallic pigments. I also worked with a variety of glazes and mediums for final surface effects.

I discovered acrylics also enabled me to use many different tools which extended my range of textures and surfaces. I used rollers, combs, spray bottles, spackling tools, crinkled plastic, twigs, and bark, to imprint new surfaces. I also used thinned paint in large hypodermic syringes to create loose lines. *Winter Woods* (Appendix, 3) is another image painted on gessoed watercolor paper. While housebound during a blizzard, I wanted to depict the density of the snow and the cold. I used several earth tones layered with rollers and drizzled with thin, linear glazes. The linear glazes were repeated and layered again with sprayed colors. Just as in *Confluence: Hampton Roads*, I incorporated metallic and interference pigments in some of the layers.

One morning, as the sun rose and gave a slice of light to the sky and forest, the intense color struck a chord in my mind's eye. *Dawn On Dennisville Road* (Appendix, 4) was also painted with acrylics on gessoed watercolor paper. To achieve the glow of dawn, I blended pastels over the acrylic base and coated the result with acrylic medium. I layered and sprayed more thin washes to complete the image. While I worked on gessoed paper, I began to think in a different way about making images. I became more experimental and aggressively sought new tools and materials. I became more sensitive to the importance of surface. The use of fluid acrylics led me to return to using oils on canvas with a new energy.

Next, I began a painting series depicting the moon over the Chesapeake Bay. They are large representational abstractions measuring 60"x48". *Moon Over Buckroe* (Appendix, 5) depicts a full fall moon rising over the water. I exaggerated the size of the

moon as a design device for graphic impact. The paint was applied in many layers of thin glazes, as I built and blended it to an enamel-like surface. I manipulated the glazes to reach a shimmering effect with cool hues reflected in the bay. I did not intend a romanticized moon. Rather, I wanted to show the presence of the moon at its most powerful. The next painting, *Moon In The Mist* (Appendix, 6), uses identical scale, composition, and locale. I portray the full moon on a tranquil, misty night when sea and sky appeared as one. As in *Moon Over Buckroe*, I began with a geometric shape and softened it with a series of glazes. *Moon Over Buckroe* was cool in hue and had more movement in the water. I tried to capture the sensation of the glow and the movement of the mist with shadowy blues, greys, and greens.

While working on these larger paintings, I began a series of drawings based upon grids. These drawings became the basis for paintings of quilt blocks. Painting quilt blocks presented several challenges. The layout of the blocks can become very complicated and I saw these not as a picture of a quilt but an homage to the strength, stability, and elegance of simple geometric shapes. My goal was to show the myriad of color juxtapositions that occur in simple quilt patterns and how they can dance across the visual field. I also wished to give a sense of human touch present in quilts by allowing imperfections in the painted surface to remain as they occurred. As I contemplated quilts, I thought of the grids used by Chuck Close. Viewed up close they lose image identity and become individual squares of color and shapes, just as quilt blocks can also be examined as whole images and parts of the whole.

My first series of quilt block paintings contains one of the simplest patterns used in quilting. In *Nine Patches* (Appendix, 7) I have painted nine square canvases with

nine square blocks. The nine patch quilt pattern consists of three rows of three squares stitched together. I began this series by dividing 12" square canvases into nine equal sections and manipulated the paint with a small brush to give subtle pattern and surface interest. I used pure hues and added several glazes of white. The glaze, which included iridescent white, was wiped away in patches to mimic comfortable, time worn fibers. Initially planned as a grouping, each of these nine paintings became individual statements, as in *Nine Patches, Lapis Center* (Appendix, 8). Traditionally, older quilts were made with on-hand scraps of fabric which may have been remainders of shirts, dresses, skirts, or pants. The necessity for frugality dictated the careful piecing. I resisted my inclination to plan each painted block as though a puzzle that had to fit a perfect design. Instead, my experimental color combinations achieved the sense of randomness seen in the old quilts, *Nine Patches, Red Center* (Appendix, 9)..

My second series of quilt block paintings was based upon the classic log cabin pattern. I was interested in the effect that differing color fields would have on a consistent central hue. Each-canvas has a central square of turquoise and the surrounding panels were studies of various color families. Juxtaposition of hues changed the appearance of the center square. Each was completed in glazes, the edges of which slightly bled into adjoining panels. I puddled the glazes with various sizes of brushes to create surface interest and a sense of softly rippled fabric.

In *Log Cabin Yellow* (Appendix, 10) the turquoise center panel of this 24"x24" painting is surrounded by selected yellow to greenish hues; in *Log Cabin Red* (Appendix, 11), warm reds; in *Log Cabin Purple* (Appendix, 12), rich purples; and in *Log Cabin Blue* (Appendix, 13), cool blues. I attempted to emphasize both the geometry of

the pattern and the vibrancy of color relationships.

Oddly enough, these quilt block patterns do parallel the quilted appearance of landscapes viewed from on high and have the same puzzle-like attraction to me. Although I have chosen two distinctively different subjects for my paintings in oils, there is continuity in color saturation, use of glazes, and simplicity of composition. I have varied the scale and worked in various series. The *Moon Over Buckroe* and *Moon In The Mist* series continued my development of images inspired by moments in nature which began earlier as acrylic works on paper. The series of *Nine Patch* and *Log Cabin* quilt block patterns reflected my interest in universal geometric motifs and experiences with fabrics. In both directions, I became less dependent upon depicting reality and more interested in motion, energy, and surface.

Throughout multiple media, substrates, and scale variations, I explored the language of color to draw in my viewers. I created surface interest and dimension through experimentation with manipulated pigments and glazes. Simple shapes such as the circle and square were repeated in works on fabric, paper, and canvas. Each medium and subject matter led me to new explorations, especially in the world of color. Those explorations will continue and I look forward to additional series of quilt patterns and moments in nature which reflect the rhythms of times and places that have meaning in my life.

Conclusion

Through the MIS-IAR Program, my concepts of image making became much broader and more exploratory. My uses of color became more experimental as I grew

to better understand substrates and media. The use of a saturated palette and varying densities of color prevailed as I learned to interpret energy and motion with more sensitive use of color glazes. Through the introduction of artists, I gained an enlarged visual vocabulary that pushes me to continue working with geometric shapes, patterns, and the challenge to distill images of nature's power.

The MIS-IAR Program helped me realize my goal of becoming a better artist. As I look back on my first painting efforts the changes are stark. Now, I work with a more fluid style, unity of subject, and less reliance on verisimilitude. There is a continuity and strength of composition that was not present before. I would like to think that anyone, anywhere, from any culture can view these paintings and understand my respect for nature, the power of patterns, and the impact of color.

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Appendix

List of Images

- Figure 1. *Four Moons*, acrylic on quilted muslin, 15" x 15"x1/4", 2007.
- Figure 2. *Confluence: Hampton Roads*, acrylic on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.
- Figure 3. *Winter Woods*, acrylic on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.
- Figure 4. *Dawn On Dennisville Road*, acrylic and pastel on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.
- Figure 5. *Moon Over Buckroe*, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2011.
- Figure 6. *Moon In The Mist*, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2011.
- Figure 7. *Nine Patches* (overview), oil on nine canvases, 12" x 12" (each canvas), 2011.
- Figure 8. *Nine Patches, Lapis Center*, oil on canvas, 12" x12", 2011.
- Figure 9. *Nine Patches, Red Center*, oil on canvas, 12" x12", 2011.
- Figure 10. *Log Cabin Yellow*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.
- Figure 11. *Log Cabin Red*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.
- Figure 12. *Log Cabin Purple*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.
- Figure 13. *Log Cabin Blue*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.



Figure 1. *Four Moons*, acrylic on quilted muslin, 15" x 15"x 1/4", 2007.



Figure 2. *Confluence: Hampton Roads*, acrylic on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.



Figure 3. *Winter Woods*, acrylic on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.



Figure 4. *Dawn On Dennisville Road*, acrylic and pastel on gessoed paper, 28" x 22", 2010.



Figure 5. *Moon Over Buckroe*, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2011.



Figure 6. *Moon In The Mist*, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2011.



Figure 7. *Nine Patches, (Overview)*, oil on nine canvas, 12" x12" (each canvas), 2011.



Figure 8. *Nine Patches, Lapis Center*, oil on canvas, 12" x12", 2011.



Figure 9. *Nine Patches, Red Center*, oil on canvas, 12" x12", 2011.



Figure 10. *Log Cabin Yellow*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.

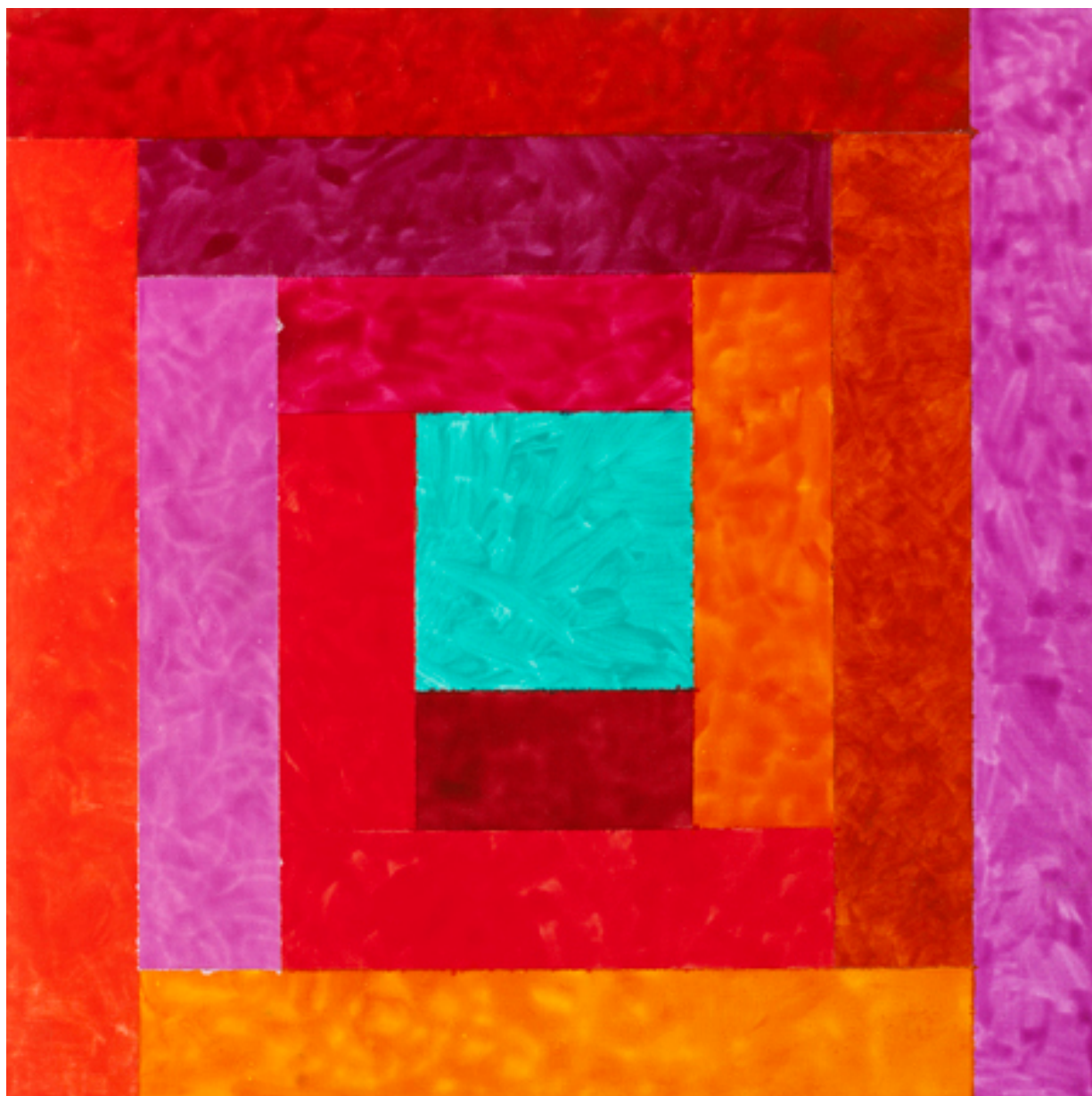


Figure 11. *Log Cabin Red*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.



Figure 12. *Log Cabin Purple*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.

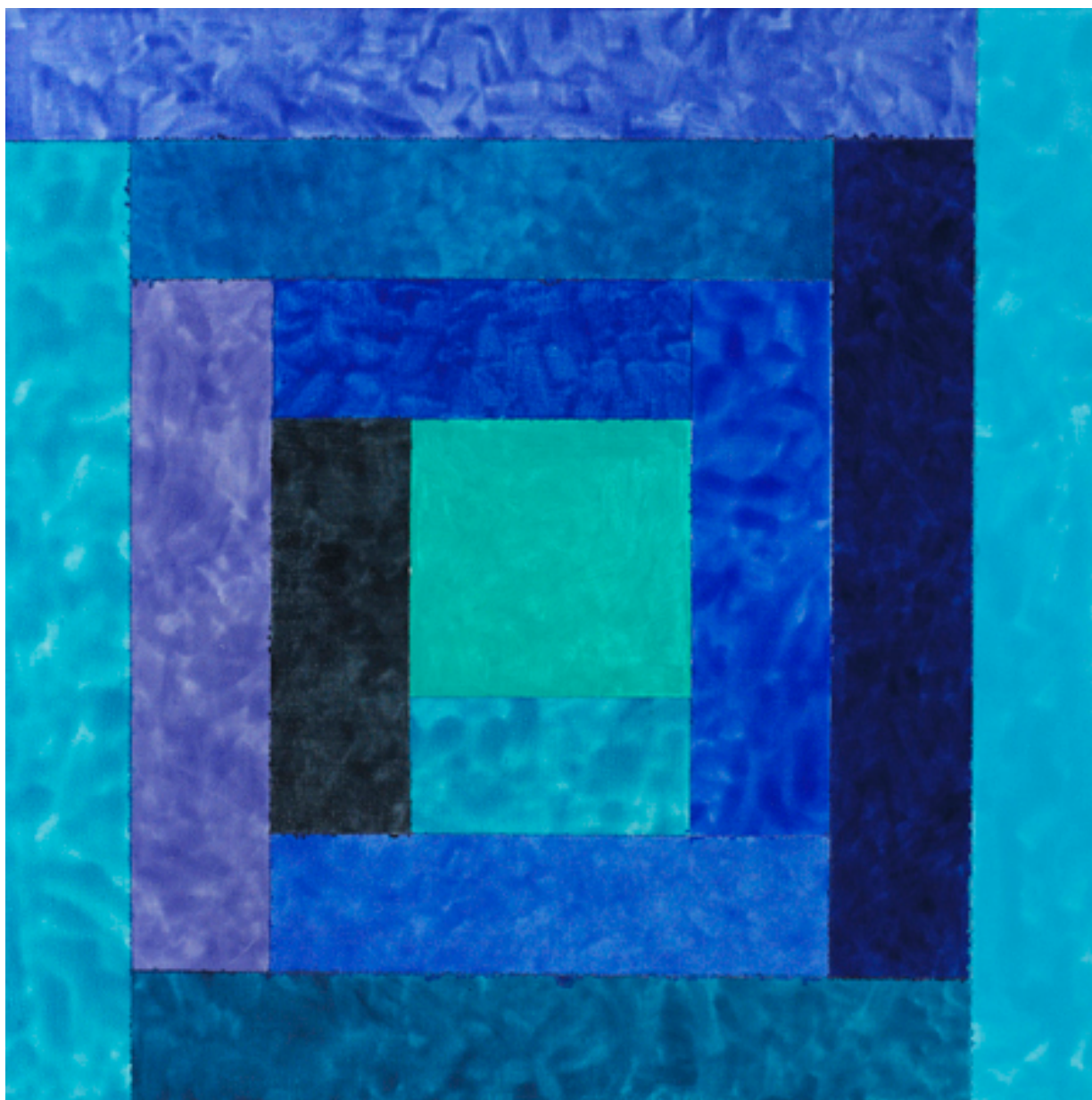


Figure 13. *Log Cabin Blue*, oil on canvas, 24" x 24", 2011.

Bettye L. Pope

Education

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2012 | Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Specialization: Painting and Crafts. |
| 1969 | Bachelor of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia |

Additional Education

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 2002-2004 | Graduate Education Courses, University of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia |
| 1971 | Art History Undergraduate Courses, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia |

Teaching Experience

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 2002-present | Visual Arts Teacher, K-12, Amelia County Elementary School, Amelia County, Virginia |
| 2001 | Visual Arts Teacher, K-12, Brunswick Senior High School, Brunswick County, Virginia |
| 2001 | Computer Graphics Instructor, Adjunct Faculty, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia |

Selected Related Experience

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1990-2001 | Creative Consultant, Hampton, Virginia |
| 1989-1990 | Senior Art Director, G. Fox Division, May Department Stores, Inc., Hartford, Connecticut |
| 1986-1988 | Creative Director, Meier and Frank Division, May Department Stores, Inc., Portland, Oregon |
| 1985-1986 | Vice President and Creative Director, Gimbels Department Store, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania |

Selected Related Experience (continued)

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1982-1985 | Creative Director, Joske's Division, Allied Stores, Inc., Houston, Texas |
| 1970-1983 | Creative Director and Art Director for several Fortune 500 and privately owned retail companies on the East Coast |

Professional Organizations

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 2002-Present | National Education Association |
| 2003-2005 | Virginia Art Education Association |
| 1993-1997 | Virginia Speakers Association, Norfolk, Virginia |
| 1996 | Board of Directors, Virginia Speakers Association, Norfolk, Virginia |
| 1993-1995 | World Futurists Society, Washington, D.C. |

Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2012 | <i>Rhythms</i> , Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, TBA |
| 2004 | <i>Strawberry Fields</i> , Strawberry Street, Richmond, Virginia |